



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

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COUPLE INDICTED FOR BRINGING IN AND HARBORING SMUGGLED TEENAGE GIRLS FROM MEXICO

Victims allegedly threatened; 14-year-old forced to work 12-hour shifts to repay debts

SALT LAKE CITY – A federal grand jury returned an eight-count indictment this morning charging a Salt Lake City couple for their role in a scheme to smuggle a 14-year-old girl and two other young women from Mexico to Utah and hold them at a local residence until each repaid \$2,800 in smuggling fees.

According to the criminal complaint filed in the case, the defendants told the women their relatives in Mexico would be killed if they failed to come up with the money. Armando Gutierrez, 40, and his wife, Martina Gutierrez, 49, both illegal aliens from Mexico, are suspected of arranging for the women to be smuggled into the United States, then providing them with counterfeit identity and immigration documents to help them obtain employment.

“People who take advantage of and abuse others for profit will be held strictly accountable under the law,” said United States Attorney Paul M. Warner. “Profiteering at the expense of human misery is not only unacceptable, but reflects a level of greed that is almost inconceivable.”

The investigation leading to today’s indictment began after agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) received a tip from someone in the community about women allegedly being held at a home located at 4231 West Stratus Street.

When ICE agents executed a search warrant at the home late last week, they found fraudulent social security and identification cards, a quantity of cocaine, and more than \$11,000 in cash. The charges against the couple include harboring illegal aliens, five counts of identity fraud, and possession with intent to distribute cocaine.

Prior to searching the home, ICE agents met with two of the women who were staying there, a 16-year-old and a 24-year-old. Investigators subsequently located the 14-year-old girl at an area factory where she had been hired to work the night shift, 12 hours a day, six days a week. All three witnesses have been placed in federal protective custody.

“It is unconscionable that in this country someone this young would be subjected to these types of conditions,” said Joseph Romel, assistant special agent-in-charge of ICE investigations in Salt Lake City. “But this just underscores the ruthlessness and greed that are characteristic of the human smuggling trade. To those involved, these people aren’t human beings. They’re a commodity being smuggled for profit.”

According to the criminal complaint, the three women were initially told their smuggling fee would be \$1,700 apiece. However, after arriving in Salt Lake City, the defendants allegedly advised the fee had increased to \$2,800. The complaint alleges the women received minimal food from the defendants and a small amount of money for clothing.

The couple will be arraigned next week on the charges. The potential maximum penalties for the charges in the indictment include a two-year mandatory minimum sentence for aggravated identity fraud; up to 20 years for the drug charge; up to 10 years for harboring illegal aliens; and a three-year mandatory minimum sentence for bringing in illegal aliens. Fines could go as high as \$1 million. The indictment also seeks forfeiture of property, a vehicle, and money.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.